

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EB-07 ISO-00 L-03 INR-07 SS-15 IGA-02 /045 W

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P 290942Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6063

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STADIS////////////////////////////////

FOR NEA

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: OVIP

SUBJECT: FY-76- PL-480 AGREEMENT

REF: STATE 20194

1. WITHOUT DISCUSSING POSSIBILITY WITH SYRIANS, OUR EXPERIENCE TO DATE LEADS ME TO SUSPECT THEY WOULD BE VERY UNHAPPY WITH PROSPECT OF SIGNING AGREEMENT WITH U.S. IN SPOTLIGHT OF SECRETARY SIMON'S VISIT. SYRIA'S LEADERS (INCLUDING ASAD), WITH WHOM WE HAVE DEALT ON ECONOMIC AND BILATERAL MATTERS, HAVE WANTED OUR RELATIONS TO GROW QUIETLY AND WITHOUT FANFARE SO AS NOT TO GIVE SYRIAN HARDLINERS OPPORTUNITY TO ATTACK ASAD'S MOVES TOWARD U.S. OR DRAW UNWARRANTED LINK BETWEEN ECONOMIC MATTERS AND POLITICAL DIFFERENCES, SUCH AS LATEST UNSC VETO.

2. SIGNING CEREMONIES FOR PL-480 AND AID AGREEMENTS CONCLUDED OVER PAST YEAR AND A HALF HAVE BEEN VERY LOW-KEY AFFAIRS WITH NO TELEVISION COVERAGE AND LITTLE OR NO MENTION IN PRESS. ON CLAIMS SETTLEMENT, WHICH WE ARE IN PROCESS OF WRAPPING UP, MIN OF ECONOMY IMADI HAS BEEN EMPHATIC IN PREFERRING VEHICLE OF AGREED MINUTES TO THAT

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OF FORMAL AGREEMENT WHICH WOULD REQUIRE PRESIDENTIAL

DECREE AND PARLIMENTARY RATIFICATION WITH INEVITABLE
EMBARRASSING ATTACKS ON GOVERNMENT FROM LEFTISTS.

3. THIRDLY, IMADI HIMSELF, WHO IS STILL SMARTING
AND FEELING VULNERABLE BECAUSE EGYPTIAN PRESS LINKED
HIM TO SYRIA'S CURRENT PL-480 REQUEST, WOULD BE
MOST LIKELY SIGNER ON SYRIAN SIDE AND MIGHT FIND
HIS POSITION WEAKENED AS A RESULT. THIS WOULD NOT
BE TO OUR INTEREST.

4. FOR ALL THESE REASONS, I DEFINITELY FORESEE
PROBLEMS IF WE PUSH FOR SIGNING CEREMONY INVOLVING
SECRETARY SIMON.
MURPHY

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